The Case Study Report on “KunQu Opera”

The KunQu Opera was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001, recognized by the world and became common spiritual wealth of mankind. In order to protect and promote traditional culture of the national outstanding, the government did a great many of works on inheritance and protection of the KunQu Opera repertory, successors training, and revitalization of the theater construction, etc, and achieved good results.

1. Introduction of KunQu Opera

KunQu Opera has a long history dating back over 600 years. It was produced from the occasion of Yuan and Ming (14th century) in Kunshan, Jiangsu province and was originally called ‘Kunshan voiced-tune’ or simply ‘Kun voiced-tune’. It was known as the four voiced-tunes of Ming Dynasty and belongs to the South opera system, together with HaiYan and YuYao voiced-tune originated in Zhejiang province, Yiyang voiced-tune originated in Jiangxi province. After the Qing Dynasty, it was called the ‘KunQu Opera’. KunQu Opera is the most influential voiced-tune opera during the Mid-Ming to Mid-Qing Dynasty. There are plenty of operas developed from the basis of KunQu Opera. Afterwards, it received
the title of ‘the ancestor of a hundred operas’.

KunQu Opera performance is accompanied with some instrumental ensembles, in which the most important is Qudi, supplemented sheng, xiao, suona, three-stringed lute, pipa, etc. (percussion ready). Some role types in KunQu Opera are Shen, Dan, Jing, Chou and so on. All the characters wear the traditional costumes. The most prominent features are strong lyrical, delicate movements, clever and harmonious combination on singing and dance movements. The dialects which were used in KunQu Opera were divided into Southern dialect and Northern dialect. Currently, the KunQu Opera has the most complete performance system in China’s opera history, and plays an important role in the history of China’s literary history, opera history, music history, dance history. In 2001, the KunQu Opera was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

2. Protection objectives of KunQu Opera

The government always pays close attention to the protection and revitalization of the KunQu Opera. According to actual situation of China's KunQu Opera protection, inheritance and development, the government has developed a specific protection plan. The object of the five-year plan for KunQu Opera rescue and protection is:
(1) By 2009, taking the Shanghai KunQu Opera Company, Suzhou KunQu Opera Theater of Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang KunQu Group as the leader to establish KunQu Opera art environment protected area, the government will make it creative KunQu Opera repertoire center, opera artistic heritage conservation center, KunQu Opera art communication center, data collecting and research center;
(2) Rescued 15 endangered classical repertoires;
(3) Produce of 10 operas, that have artistic skills and well-made excellent;
(4) Collect and collate a number of precious cultural relics and historical information of KunQu Opera;
(5) Train a number of special personnel working for KunQu Opera;
(6) Foster a number of hardcore fans who has keen interest in the art of opera;
Through doing these, the government hopes to promote the living state of the KunQu Opera in order to match its position in world culture.

3. Methods and results about KunQu Opera protection project
Passing the torch of KunQu Opera so far, it is largely dependent on the essence of its performing arts transmission. At present, rescue and transmission the essence of the KunQu’s performing arts, is
one of the most important tasks about the project. According to the actual needs, it puts forward the guideline of safeguarding work: protection, transmission, innovation and development. Firstly, in areas of the identification, documentation and preservation, the government rescues and gradually completes recording about classical repertoire, and designated specific units responsible for safekeeping and preservation the documents. Secondly, in areas of the promotion, enhancement, transmission, the government and community hold the public welfare cultural showing events, as well as formal and informal education, training a large number of successors and audiences. In order to improve the overall quality of the actors, the project invites the famous KunQu’s theorist and performance artist to train young actors on a regular basis. The project also rewards the creators who did outstanding contributions to KunQu Opera on the protection, inheritance, innovation and development.

In terms of informal education, the government and community hold various welfare public performances, for dissemination of KunQu Opera knowledge and developing the people's appreciation. Especially in recent years, it brings KunQu Opera into the campus, then makes the majority of young students to like the ethnic culture. For example, the students of Shanghai Conservatory of Music set
up their own organization studying KunQu in spare time which named ‘ShangXin associations’.
Thirdly, in the areas of KunQu Opera study and protection, the government set up a special research and safeguarding institutions. Such as the establishment of the KunQu Art Research Center in China’s Art Academy and National KunQu Museum, it has done a lot of work in KunQu Opera collection, collation and protection. In addition, to enhance the international artistic exchange and to promote diversity of world culture, the government provides financial aid for international exchange activities, and actively strengthens national protection of traditional cultural cooperation. By learning from the experiences of other countries in cultural heritage protection, the effective protection and rational use of cultural heritage, the government promotes sustainable development of the KunQu Opera.
Finally, in areas of heritage revitalization, the government carries out a series of activities revitalize policies, based on the previous policies, and establishes the protection special fund of the KunQu Opera revitalization, arranging financing repertoire and creating the new repertoires, rescuing and protecting the endangered repertoire, collecting and preservation data of the old artists.

4. Summary
The Chinese government has attached great importance to the rescue and protection of traditional culture for a long time. From the very early period of new China, the government has given strong and continuous support, formulated and published a series of protective measures on KunQu Opera. When the UNESCO announcing ‘Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage’ in 2003, combined with intangible cultural heritage protection, transmission and development of the actual situation, the Chinese government formulated and promulgated a series policies on protection national intangible cultural heritage. And they provided policy guarantee for the KunQu Opera's rescue, protection and revitalization projects.

Furthermore, the government actively explored sustainable development protection. Through constantly sum up experiences that implemented protection in the process of KunQu Opera, it provides reference on other protection projects of intangible cultural heritage, and makes positive efforts on promoting the cultural diversity.